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SOCIOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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I. SOCIOLOGY AND "SCIENTIFIC" HISTORY

Sociology first gained recognition as an independent science with the publication, between 1830 and 1842, of Auguste Comte's *Cours de Philosophie Positive*. Comte did not, to be sure, create sociology. He did give it a name, a program, and a place among the sciences.

Comte's program for the new science proposed an extension to politics and to history of the positive methods of the natural sciences. Its practical aim was to establish government on the secure foundation of an exact science and give to the predictions of history something of the precision of mathematical formulae.

We have to contemplate social phenomena as susceptible of prevision, like all other classes, within the limits of exactness compatible with their higher complexity. Comprehending the three characteristics of political science which we have been examining, prevision of social phenomena supposes, first, that we have abandoned the region of metaphysical idealities, to assume the ground of observed realities by a systematic subordination of imagination to observation; secondly, that political conceptions have ceased to be absolute, and have become relative to the variable state of civilization, so that theories, following the natural course of facts, may admit of our foreseeing them; and, thirdly, that permanent political action is limited

by determinate laws, since, if social events were always exposed to disturbance by the accidental intervention of the legislator, human or divine, no scientific prevision of them would be possible. Thus, we may concentrate the conditions of the spirit of positive social philosophy on this one great attribute of scientific prevision.¹

Comte proposed, in short, to make government a technical science and politics a profession. He looked forward to a time when legislation, based on a scientific study of human nature, would assume the character of natural law. The earlier and more elementary sciences, particularly physics and chemistry, had given man control over external nature; the last science, sociology, was to give man control over himself.

Men were long in learning that Man's power of modifying phenomena can result only from his knowledge of their natural laws; and in the infancy of each science, they believed themselves able to exert an unbounded influence over the phenomena of that science. . . . Social phenomena are, of course, from their extreme complexity, the last to be freed from this pretension: but it is therefore only the more necessary to remember that the pretension existed with regard to all the rest, in their earliest stage, and to anticipate therefore that social science will, in its turn, be emancipated from the delusion. . . . It [the existing social science] represents the social action of Man to be indefinite and arbitrary, as was once thought in regard to biological, chemical, physical, and even astronomical phenomena, in the earlier stages of their respective sciences. . . . The human race finds itself delivered over, without logical protection, to the ill-regulated experimentation of the various political schools, each one of which strives to set up, for all future time, its own immutable type of government. We have seen what are the chaotic results of such a strife; and we shall find that there is no chance of order and agreement but in subjecting social phenomena, like all others, to invariable natural laws, which shall, as a whole, prescribe for each period, with entire certainty, the limits and character of political action: in other words, introducing into the study of social phenomena the same positive spirit which has regenerated every other branch of human speculation.²

In the present anarchy of political opinion and parties, changes in the existing social order inevitably assume, he urged, the character, at the best, of a mere groping empiricism; at the worst, of a social convulsion like that of the French Revolution. Under the

¹ Harriet Martineau, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, freely translated and condensed (London, 1893), II, 61.

² Harriet Martineau, *op. cit.*, II, 59-60.

direction of a positive, in place of a speculative or, as Comte would have said, metaphysical science of society, progress must assume the character of an orderly march.

It was to be expected, with the extension of exact methods of investigation to other fields of knowledge, that the study of man and of society would become, or seek to become, scientific in the sense in which that word is used in the natural sciences. It is interesting, in this connection, that Comte's first name for sociology was *social physics*. It was not until he had reached the fourth volume of his *Positive Philosophy* that the word sociological is used for the first time.

Comte, if he was foremost, was not first in the search for a positive science of society, which would give man that control over men that he had over external nature. Montesquieu, in his *Spirit of the Laws*, first published in 1747, had distinguished in the organization of society, between form, "the particular structure," and the forces, "the human passions which set it in motion." In his preface to this first epoch-making essay in what Freeman calls "comparative politics," Montesquieu suggests that the uniformities, which he discovered beneath the wide variety of positive law, were contributions not merely to a science of law, but to a science of mankind.

I have first of all considered mankind; and the result of my thoughts has been, that amidst such an infinite diversity of laws and manners, they are not solely conducted by the caprice of fancy.¹

Hume, likewise, put politics among the natural sciences.² Condorcet wanted to make history positive.³ But there were, in the period between 1815 and 1840 in France, conditions which made the need of a new science of politics peculiarly urgent. The Revolution had failed and the political philosophy, which had directed and justified it, was bankrupt. France between 1789 and 1815

¹ Montesquieu, Baron M. de Secondat, *The Spirit of the Laws*, translated by Thomas Nugent (Cincinnati, 1873), I, xxxi.

² David Hume, *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Part II, sec. 7.

³ Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1795), 292. See Barth, *Die Philosophie der Geschichte als Sociologie* (Leipzig, 1897), Part I, pp. 21-23.

had adopted, tried, and rejected no less than ten different constitutions. But during this period, as Saint-Simon noted, society, and the human beings who compose society, had not changed. It was evident that government was not, in any such sense as the philosophers had assumed, a mere artifact and legislative construction. Civilization, as Saint-Simon conceived it, was a part of nature. Social change was part of the whole cosmic process. He proposed, therefore, to make politics a science as positive as physics. The subject-matter of political science, as he conceived it, was not so much political forms as social conditions. History had been literature. It was destined to become a science.¹

Comte called himself Saint-Simon's pupil. It is perhaps more correct to say Saint-Simon formulated the problem for which Comte, in his *Positive Philosophy*, sought a solution. It was Comte's notion that with the arrival of sociology the distinction which had so long existed, and still exists, between philosophy, in which men define their wishes, and natural science, in which they describe the existing order of nature, would disappear. In that case ideals would be defined in terms of reality, and the tragic difference between what men want and what is possible would be effaced. Comte's error was to mistake a theory of progress for progress itself. It is certainly true that as men learn what is, they will adjust their ideals to what is possible. But knowledge grows slowly.

Man's knowledge of mankind has increased greatly since 1842. Sociology, "the positive science of humanity," has moved steadily forward in the direction that Comte's program indicated, but it has not yet replaced history. Historians are still looking for methods of investigation which will make history "scientific."

No one who has watched the course of history during the last generation can have felt doubt of its tendency. Those of us who read Buckle's first volume when it appeared in 1857, and almost immediately afterwards, in 1859, read the *Origin of Species* and felt the violent impulse which Darwin gave to the study of natural laws, never doubted that historians would follow until they had exhausted every possible hypothesis to create a science of history. Year after year passed, and little progress has been made. Perhaps

¹ *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon et d'Enfantin* (Paris, 1865-78), XVII, 228. Paul Barth, *op. cit.*, Part I, p. 23.

the mass of students are more skeptical now than they were thirty years ago of the possibility that such a science can be created. Yet almost every successful historian has been busy with it, adding here a new analysis, a new generalization there; a clear and definite connection where before the rupture of idea was absolute; and, above all, extending the field of study until it shall include all races, all countries, and all times. Like other branches of science, history is now encumbered and hampered by its own mass, but its tendency is always the same, and cannot be other than what it is. That the effort to make history a science may fail is possible, and perhaps probable; but that it should cease, unless for reasons that would cause all science to cease, is not within the range of experience. Historians will not, and even if they would they can not, abandon the attempt. Science itself would admit its own failure if it admitted that man, the most important of all its subjects, could not be brought within its range.¹

Since Comte gave the new science of humanity a name and a point of view, the area of historical investigation has vastly widened and a number of new social sciences have come into existence—ethnology, archaeology, folklore, the comparative studies of cultural materials, i.e., language, mythology, religion, and law, and in connection with and closely related with these, folk-psychology, social psychology, and the psychology of crowds, which latter is, perhaps, the forerunner of a wider and more elaborate political psychology. The historians have been very much concerned with these new bodies of materials and with the new points of view which they have introduced into the study of man and of society. Under the influences of these sciences, history itself, as James Harvey Robinson has pointed out, has had a history. But with the innovations which the new history has introduced or attempted to introduce, it does not appear that there have been any fundamental changes in method or ideology in the science itself.

Fifty years have elapsed since Buckle's book appeared, and I know of no historian who would venture to maintain that we had made any considerable advance toward the goal he set for himself. A systematic persecution of the various branches of social science, especially political economy, sociology, anthropology, and psychology, is succeeding in explaining many things; but history must always remain, from the standpoint of the astronomer, physicist, or chemist, a highly inexact and fragmentary body of knowledge. . . . History can no doubt be pursued in a strictly scientific spirit, but

¹ Henry Adams, *The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma* (New York, 1919), p. 126.

the data we possess in regard to the past of mankind are not of a nature to lend themselves to organization into an exact science, although, as we shall see, they may yield truths of vital importance.¹

History has not become, as Comte believed it must, an exact science, and sociology has not taken its place in the social sciences. It is important, however, for understanding the mutations which have taken place in sociology since Comte to remember that it had its origin in an effort to make history exact. This, with, to be sure, considerable modifications, is still, as we shall see, an ambition of the science.

II. HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FACTS

Sociology, as Comte conceived it, was not, as it has been characterized, "a highly important point of view," but a fundamental science, i.e., a method of investigation and "a body of discoveries about mankind."² In the hierarchy of the sciences, sociology, the last in time, was first in importance. The order was as follows: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, including psychology, sociology. This order represented a progression from the more elementary to the more complex. It was because history and politics were concerned with the most complex of natural phenomena that they were the last to achieve what Comte called the positive character. They did this in sociology.

Many attempts have been made before and since Comte to find a satisfactory classification of the sciences. The order and relation of the sciences is still, in fact, one of the cardinal problems of philosophy. In recent years the notion has gained recognition that the difference between history and the natural sciences is not one of degree, but of kind; not of subject-matter merely, but of method. This difference in method is, however, fundamental. It is a difference not merely in the interpretation but in the *logical character* of facts.

Every historical fact, it is pointed out, is concerned with a unique event. History never repeats itself. If nothing else, the mere circumstance that every event has a *date* and *location* would

¹ James Harvey Robinson, *The New History, Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook* (New York, 1912), pp. 54-55.

² James Harvey Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

give historical facts an individuality that facts of the abstract science do not possess. Because historical facts always are located and dated, and cannot therefore be repeated, they are not subject to experiment and verification. On the other hand, a fact not subject to verification is not a fact for natural science. History, as distinguished from natural history, deals with individuals, i.e., individual events, persons, institutions. Natural science is concerned, not with individuals, but with classes, types, species. All the assertions that are valid for natural science concern classes. An illustration will make this distinction clear.

Sometime in October, 1838, Charles Darwin happened to pick up and read Malthus' book on *Population*. The facts of "the struggle for existence," so strikingly presented in that now celebrated volume, suggested an explanation of a problem which had long interested and puzzled him, namely the origin of species.

This is a statement of a historical fact, and the point is that it is not subject to empirical verification. It cannot be stated, in other words, in the form of a hypothesis, which further observation of other men of the same type will either verify or discredit.

On the other hand, in his *Descent of Man*, Darwin, discussing the rôle of sexual selection in evolution of the species, makes this observation: "Naturalists are much divided with respect to the object of the singing of birds. Few more careful observers ever lived than Montagu, and he maintained that the 'males of song-birds and of many others do not in general search for the female, but, on the contrary, their business in spring is to perch on some conspicuous spot, breathing out their full and amorous notes, which, by instinct, the female knows and repairs to the spot to choose her mate.' "

This is a typical statement of a fact of natural history. It is not, however, the rather vague generality of the statement that makes it scientific. It is its representative character, the character which makes it possible of verification by further observation which makes it a scientific fact.

It is from facts of this kind, collected, compared, and classified, irrespective of time or place, that the more general conclusions are drawn, upon which Darwin based his theory of the "descent of

man." This theory, as Darwin conceived it, was not an *interpretation* of the facts but an *explanation*.

The relation between history and sociology, as well as the manner in which the more abstract social sciences have risen out of the more concrete, may be illustrated by a comparison between history and geography. Geography as a science is concerned with the visible world, the earth, its location in space, the distribution of the land masses, and of the plants, animals, and peoples upon its surface. The order, at least the fundamental order, which it seeks and finds among the objects it investigates is *spatial*. As soon as the geographer begins to compare and classify the plants, the animals, and the peoples with which he comes in contact, geography passes over into the special sciences, i.e., botany, zoölogy, and anthropology.

History, on the other hand, is concerned with a world of events. Not everything that happened, to be sure, is history, but every event that ever was or ever will be significant is history.

Geography attempts to reproduce for us the visible world as it exists in space; history, on the contrary, seeks to re-create for us in the present the significance of the past. As soon as historians seek to take events out of their historical setting, that is to say, out of their time and space relations, in order to compare them and classify them; as soon as historians begin to emphasize the typical and representative rather than the unique character of events, history ceases to be history and becomes sociology.

The differences here indicated between history and sociology are based upon a more fundamental distinction between the historical and the natural sciences first clearly defined by Windelband, the historian of philosophy, in an address to the faculty of the University of Strassburg in 1894.

The distinction between natural science and history begins at the point where we seek to convert facts into knowledge. Here again we observe that the one (natural science) seeks to formulate laws, the other (history) to portray events. In the one case thought proceeds from the description of particulars to the general relations. In the other case it clings to a genial depiction of the individual object or event. For the natural scientist the object of investigation which cannot be repeated never has, as such, scientific value. It serves his purpose only so far as it may be regarded as a type or as a special instance

of a class from which the type may be deduced. The natural scientist considers the single case only so far as he can see in it the features which serve to throw light upon a general law. For the historian the problem is to revive and call up into the present, in all its particularity, an event in the past. His aim is to do for an actual event precisely what the artist seeks to do for the object of his imagination. It is just here that we discern the kinship between history and art, between the historian and the writer of literature. It is for this reason that natural science emphasized the abstract; the historian, on the other hand, is interested mainly in the concrete.

The fact that natural science emphasizes the abstract and history the concrete will become clearer if we compare the results of the researches of the two sciences. However finespun the conceptions may be which the historical critic uses in working over his materials, the final goal of such study is always to create out of the mass of events a vivid portrait of the past. And what history offers us is pictures of men and of human life, with all the wealth of their individuality, reproduced in all their characteristic vivacity. Thus do the peoples and languages of the past, their forms and beliefs, their struggles for power and freedom, speak to us through the mouth of history.

How different it is with the world which the natural sciences have created for us! However concrete the materials with which they started, the goal of these sciences is theories, eventually mathematical formulations of laws of change. Treating the individual, sensuous, changing objects as mere unsubstantial appearances (phenomena), scientific investigation becomes a search for the universal laws which rule the timeless changes of events. Out of this colorful world of the senses, science creates a system of abstract concepts, in which the true nature of things is conceived to exist—a world of colorless and soundless atoms, despoiled of all their earthly sensuous qualities. Such is the triumph of thought over perception. Indifferent to change, science casts her anchor in the eternal and unchangeable. Not the change as such but the unchanging form of change is what she seeks.

This raises the question: What is the more valuable for the purposes of knowledge in general, a knowledge of law or a knowledge of events? As far as that is concerned, both scientific procedures may be equally justified. The knowledge of the universal laws has everywhere a practical value in so far as they make possible man's purposeful intervention in the natural processes. That is quite as true of the movements of the inner as of the outer world. In the latter case knowledge of nature's laws has made it possible to create those tools through which the control of mankind over external nature is steadily being extended.

Not less for the purposes of the common life are we dependent upon the results of historical knowledge. Man is, to change the ancient form of the expression, the animal who has a history. His cultural life rests on the transmission from generation to generation of a constantly increasing body of historical memories. Whoever proposes to take an active part in this cultural

process must have an understanding of history. Wherever the thread is once broken—as history itself proves—it must be painfully gathered up and knitted again into the historical fabric.

It is, to be sure, true that it is an economy for human understanding to be able to reduce to a formula or a general concept the common characteristics of individuals. But the more man seeks to reduce facts to concepts and laws, the more he is obliged to sacrifice and neglect the individual. Men have, to be sure, sought, in characteristic modern fashion, “to make of history a natural science.” This was the case with the so-called philosophy of history of positivism. What has been the net result of the laws of history which it has given us? A few trivial generalities which justify themselves only by most careful consideration of their numerous exceptions.

On the other hand it is certain that all interest and values of life are concerned with what is unique in men and events. Consider how quickly our appreciation is deadened as some object is multiplied or is regarded as one case in a thousand. “She is not the first” is one of the cruel passages in *Faust*. It is in the individuality and the uniqueness of an object that all our sense of value has its roots. It is upon this fact that Spinoza’s doctrine of the conquest of the passions by knowledge rests, since for him knowledge is the submergence of the individual in the universal, the “once for all” into the eternal.

The fact that all our livelier appreciations rest upon the unique character of the object is illustrated above all in our relations to persons. Is it not an unendurable thought, that a loved object, an adored person, should have existed at some other time in just the form in which it now exists for us? Is it not horrible and unthinkable that one of us, with just this same individuality, should actually have existed in a second edition?

What is true of the individual man is quite as true of the whole historical process: it has value only when it is unique. This is the principle which the Christian doctrine successfully maintained, as over against Hellenism in the Patristic philosophy. The middle point of their conception of the world was the fall and the salvation of mankind as a unique event. That was the first and great perception of the inalienable metaphysical right of the historian to preserve for the memory of mankind, in all their uniqueness and individuality, the actual events of life.¹

Like every other species of animal, man has a natural history. Anthropology is the science of man considered as one of the animal

¹ Wilhelm Windelband, *Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft, Rede zum Antritt des Rectorats der Kaiser-Wilhelms-Universität Strassburg* (Strassburg, 1900). The logical principle outlined by Windelband has been further elaborated by Heinrich Rickert in *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung, eine logische Einleitung in die historische Wissenschaft* (Tübingen u. Leipzig, 1902). See also Georg Simmel, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie, eine erkenntnistheoretische Studie* (2d ed., Leipzig, 1915).

species, *Homo sapiens*. History and sociology, on the other hand, are concerned with man as a person, as a "political animal," participating with his fellows in a common fund of social traditions and cultural ideals. Freeman, the English historian, said that history was "past politics" and politics "present history." Freeman uses the word politics in the large and liberal sense in which it was first used by Aristotle. In that broad sense of the word, the political process, by which men are controlled and states governed, and the cultural process, by which man has been domesticated and human nature formed, are not, as we ordinarily assume, different, but identical, procedures.

All this suggests the intimate relations which exist between history, politics, and sociology. The important thing, however, is not the identities but the distinctions. For, however much the various disciplines may, in practice, overlap, it is necessary for the sake of clear thinking to have their limits defined. As far as sociology and history are concerned the differences may be summed up in a word. Both history and sociology are concerned with the life of man as man. History, however, seeks to reproduce and interpret concrete events as they actually occurred in time and space. Sociology, on the other hand, seeks to arrive at natural laws and generalizations in regard to human nature and society, irrespective of time and of place.

In other words, history seeks to find out what actually happened and how it all came about. Sociology, on the other hand, seeks to explain, on the basis of a study of other instances, the nature of the process involved.

By nature we mean just that aspect and character of things in regard to which it is possible to make general statements and formulate laws. If we say, in explanation of the peculiar behavior of some individual, that it is natural or that it is after all "simply human nature," we are simply saying that this behavior is what we have learned to expect of this individual or of human beings in general. It is, in other words, a law.

Natural law, as the term is used here, is any statement which describes the behavior of a class of objects or the character of a class of acts. For example, the classic illustration of the so-called

"universal proposition" familiar to students of formal logic, "all men are mortal," is an assertion in regard to a class of objects we call men. This is, of course, simply a more formal way of saying that "men die." Such general statements and "laws" get meaning only when they are applied to particular cases, or, to speak again the terms of formal logic, when they find a place in a syllogism, thus: "Men are mortal. This is a man." But such syllogisms may always be stated in the form of a hypothesis. If this is a man, he is mortal. If a is b , a is also c . This statement, "Human nature is a product of social contact," is a general assertion familiar to students of sociology. This law or, more correctly, hypothesis, applied to an individual case explains the so-called feral man. Wild men, in the proper sense of the word, are not the so-called savages, but the men who have never been domesticated, of which an individual example is now and then discovered.

To state a law in the form of a hypothesis serves to emphasize the fact that laws—what we have called natural laws at any rate—are subject to verification and restatement. Under these circumstances the exceptional instance, which compels a restatement of the hypothesis, is more important for the purposes of science than other instances which merely confirm it.

Any science which operates with hypotheses and seeks to state facts in such a way that they can be compared and verified by further observation and experiment is, so far as method is concerned, a natural science.

III. HUMAN NATURE AND LAW

One thing that makes the conception of natural history and natural law important to the student of sociology is that in the field of the social sciences the distinction between natural and moral law has from the first been confused. Comte and the social philosophers in France after the Revolution set out with the deliberate purpose of superseding legislative enactments by laws of human nature, laws which were to be positive and "scientific." As a matter of fact, sociology, in becoming positive, so far from effacing, has rather emphasized the distinctions that Comte sought to abolish. Natural law may be distinguished from all other forms

of law by the fact that it aims at nothing more than a description of the behavior of certain types or classes of objects. A description of the way in which a class, i.e., men, plants, animals, or physical objects, may be expected under ordinary circumstances to behave, tells us what we may in a general way expect of any individual member of that class. If natural science seeks to predict, it is able to do so simply because it operates with concepts or class names instead, as is the case with history, with concrete facts and, to use a logical phrase, "existential propositions."

That the chief end of science is descriptive formulation has probably been clear to keen analytic minds since the time of Galileo, especially to the great discoverers in astronomy, mechanics, and dynamics. But as a definitely stated conception, corrective of misunderstandings, the view of science as essentially descriptive began to make itself felt about the beginning of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and may be associated with the names of Kirchhoff and Mach. It was in 1876 that Kirchhoff defined the task of mechanics as that of "describing completely and in the simplest manner the motions which take place in nature." Widening this a little, we may say that the aim of science is to describe natural phenomena and occurrences as exactly as possible, as simply as possible, as completely as possible, as consistently as possible, and always in terms which are communicable and verifiable. This is a very different rôle from that of solving the riddles of the universe, and it is well expressed in what Newton said in regard to the law of gravitation: "So far I have accounted for the phenomena presented to us by the heavens and the sea by means of the force of gravity, but I have as yet assigned no cause to this gravity. . . . I have not been able to deduce from phenomena the *raison d'être* of the properties of gravity and I have not set up hypotheses."¹

"We must confess," said Prof. J. H. Poynting (1900, p. 616), "that physical laws have greatly fallen off in dignity. No long time ago they were quite commonly described as the Fixed Laws of Nature, and were supposed sufficient in themselves to govern the universe. Now we can only assign to them the humble rank of mere descriptions, often erroneous, of similarities which we believe we have observed. . . . A law of nature explains nothing, it has no governing power, it is but a descriptive formula which the careless have sometimes personified." It used to be said that "the laws of Nature are the thoughts of God"; now we say that they are the investigator's formulae summing up regularities of recurrence.²

¹ Newton, *Philosophia naturalis principia mathematica*, 1687.

² J. Arthur Thomson, *The System of Animate Nature* (New York, 1920), pp. 8-9. See also Karl Pearson, *The Grammar of Science* (2d ed.; London, 1900), chap iii, The Scientific Law.

If natural law aims at prediction it tells us what we can do. Moral laws, on the other hand, tell us, not what we can, but what we ought to do. The civil or municipal law, finally, tells us not what we can, nor what we ought, but what we must do. It is very evident that these three types of law may be very intimately related. We do not know what we ought to do until we know what we can do; and we certainly should consider what men can do before we pass laws prescribing what they must do. There is, moreover, no likelihood that these distinctions will ever be completely abolished. As long as the words "can," "ought," and "must" continue to have any meaning for us the distinctions that they represent will persist in science as well as in common sense.

The immense prestige which the methods of the natural sciences have gained, particularly in their application to the phenomena of the physical universe, has undoubtedly led scientific men to overestimate the importance of mere conceptual and abstract knowledge. It has led them to assume that history also must eventually become "scientific" in the sense of the natural sciences. In the meantime the vast collections of historical facts which the industry of historical students has accumulated are regarded, sometimes even by historians themselves, as a sort of raw material, the value of which can only be realized after it has been worked over into some sort of historical generalization which has the general character of scientific and, ultimately, mathematical formula.

"History," says Karl Pearson, "can never become science, can never be anything but a catalogue of facts rehearsed in a more or less pleasing language until these facts are seen to fall into sequences which can be briefly resumed in scientific formulae."¹ And Henry Adams, in a letter to the American Historical Association already referred to, confesses that history has thus far been a fruitless quest for "the secret which would transform these odds and ends of philosophy into one self-evident, harmonious, and complete system."

You may be sure that four out of five serious students of history who are living today have, in the course of their work, felt that they stood on the brink of a great generalization that would reduce all history under a law as

¹ Karl Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

clear as the laws which govern the material world. As the great writers of our time have touched one by one the separate fragments of admitted law by which society betrays its character as a subject for science, not one of them can have failed to feel an instant's hope that he might find the secret which would transform these odds and ends of philosophy into one self-evident, harmonious, and complete system. He has seemed to have it, as the Spanish say, in his inkstand. Scores of times he must have dropped his pen to think how one short step, one sudden inspiration, would show all human knowledge; how, in these thickset forests of history, one corner turned, one faint trail struck, would bring him on the highroad of science. Every professor who has tried to teach the doubtful facts which we now call history must have felt that sooner or later he or another would put order in the chaos and bring light into darkness. Not so much genius or favor was needed as patience and good luck. The law was certainly there, and as certainly was in places actually visible, to be touched and handled, as though it were a law of chemistry or physics. No teacher with a spark of imagination or with an idea of scientific method can have helped dreaming of the immortality that would be achieved by the man who should successfully apply Darwin's method to the facts of human history.¹

The truth is, however, that the concrete facts, in which history and geography have sought to preserve the visible, tangible, and, generally speaking, the experiential aspects of human life and the visible universe, have a value irrespective of any generalization or ideal constructions which may be inferred from or built up out of them. Just as none of the investigations or generalizations of individual psychology are ever likely to take the place of biography and autobiography, so none of the conceptions of an abstract sociology, no scientific descriptions of the social and cultural processes, and no laws of progress are likely, in the near future at any rate, to supersede the more concrete facts of history in which are preserved those records of those unique and never fully comprehended aspects of life which we call *events*.

It has been the dream of philosophers that theoretical and abstract science could and some day perhaps would succeed in putting into formulae and into general terms all that was significant in the concrete facts of life. It has been the tragic mistake of the so-called intellectuals, who have gained their knowledge from textbooks rather than from observation and research, to assume that

¹ Henry Adams, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

science had already realized its dream. But there is no indication that science has begun to exhaust the sources or significance of concrete experience. The infinite variety of external nature and the inexhaustible wealth of personal experience have thus far defied, and no doubt will continue to defy, the industry of scientific classification, while, on the other hand, the discoveries of science are constantly making accessible to us new and larger areas of experience.

What has been said simply serves to emphasize the instrumental character of the abstract sciences. History and geography, all of the concrete sciences, can and do measurably enlarge our experience of life. Their very purpose is to arouse new interests and create new sympathies; to give mankind, in short, an environment so vast and varied as will call out and activate all his instincts and capacities.

The more abstract sciences, just to the extent which they are abstract and exact, like mathematics and logic, are merely methods and tools for converting experience into knowledge and applying the knowledge so gained to practical uses.

IV. HISTORY, NATURAL HISTORY, AND SOCIOLOGY

Although it is possible to draw clear distinctions in theory between the purpose and methods of history and sociology, in practice the two forms of knowledge pass over into one another by almost imperceptible gradations.

The sociological point of view makes its appearance in historical investigation as soon as the historian turns from the study of "periods" to the study of institutions. The history of institutions, that is to say, the family, the church, economic institutions, political institutions, etc., leads inevitably to comparison, classification, the formation of class names or concepts, and eventually to the formulation of law. In the process, history becomes natural history, and natural history passes over into natural science. In short, history becomes sociology.

Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage* is one of the earliest attempts to write the natural history of a social institution. It is based upon a comparison and classification of marriage customs

of widely scattered peoples, living under varied physical and social conditions. What one gets from a survey of this kind is not so much history as a study of human behavior. The history of marriage, as of any other institution, is, in other words, not so much an account of what certain individuals or groups of individuals did at certain times and certain places, as it is a description of the responses of few fundamental human instincts to a variety of social situations. Westermarck calls this kind of history sociology.¹

It is in the firm conviction that the history of human civilization should be made an object of as scientific a treatment as the history of organic nature that I write this book. Like the phenomena of physical and psychical life those of social life should be classified into certain groups and each group investigated with regard to its origin and development. Only when treated in this way can history lay claim to the rank and honour of a science in the highest sense of the term, as forming an important part of Sociology, the youngest of the principal branches of learning.

Descriptive historiography has no higher object than that of offering materials to this science.²

Westermarck refers to the facts which he has collected in his history of marriage as phenomena. For the explanation of these phenomena, however, he looks to the more abstract sciences.

The causes on which social phenomena are dependent fall within the domain of different sciences—Biology, Psychology, or Sociology. The reader will find that I put particular stress upon the psychological causes, which have often been deplorably overlooked, or only imperfectly touched upon. And more especially do I believe that the mere instincts have played a very important part in the origin of social institutions and rules.³

¹ Prof. Robertson Smith (*Nature*, XLIV, 270), criticizing Westermarck's *History of Human Marriage*, complains that the author has confused history with natural history. "The history of an institution," he writes, "which is controlled by public opinion and regulated by law is not natural history. The true history of marriage begins where the natural history of pairing ends. . . . To treat these topics (polyandry, kinship through the female only, infanticide, exogamy) as essentially a part of the natural history of pairing involves a tacit assumption that the laws of society are at bottom mere formulated instincts, and this assumption really underlies all our author's theories. His fundamental position compels him, if he will be consistent with himself, to hold that every institution connected with marriage that has universal validity, or forms an integral part of the main line of development, is rooted in instinct, and that institutions which are not based on instinct are necessarily exceptional and unimportant for scientific history."

² Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage* (London, 1901), p. 1.

³ E. Westermarck, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Westermarck derived most of his materials for the study of marriage from ethnological materials. Ethnologists, students of folklore (German *Völkerkunde*), and archaeology are less certain than the historians of institutions whether their investigations are historical or sociological.

Jane Harrison, although she disclaims the title of sociologist, bases her conception of the origin of Greek religion on a sociological theory, the theory namely that "among primitive peoples religion reflects collective feeling and collective thinking." Dionysius, the god of the Greek mysteries, is according to her interpretation a product of the group consciousness.

The mystery-god arises out of those instincts, emotions, desires which attend and express life; but these emotions, desires, instincts, in so far as they are religious, are at the outset rather of a group than of individual consciousness. . . . It is a necessary and most important corollary to this doctrine, that the form taken by the divinity reflects the social structure of the group to which the divinity belongs. Dionysius is the Son of his Mother because he issues from a matrilinear group.¹

This whole study is, in fact, merely an application of Durkheim's conception of "collective representations."

Robert H. Lowie, in his recent volume, *Primitive Society*, refers to "ethnologists and other historians," but at the same time asks: "What kind of an historian shall the ethnologist be?"

He answers the question by saying that, "If there are laws of social evolution, he [the ethnologist] must assuredly discover them," but at any rate, and first of all, "his duty is to ascertain the course civilization has *actually* followed. . . . To strive for the ideals of another branch of knowledge may be positively pernicious, for it can easily lead to that factitious simplification which means falsification."

In other words, ethnology, like history, seeks to tell what actually happened. It is bound to avoid abstraction, "oversimplification," and formulae, and these are the ideals of another kind of scientific procedure. As a matter of fact, however, ethnology, even when it has attempted nothing more than a description

¹ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis, A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1912), p. ix.

of the existing cultures of primitive peoples, their present distribution and the order of their succession, has not freed itself wholly from the influence of abstract considerations. Theoretical problems inevitably arise for the solution of which it is necessary to go to psychology and sociology. One of the questions that has arisen in the study, particularly the comparative study, of cultures is: how far any existing cultural trait is borrowed and how far it is to be regarded as of independent origin.

In the historical reconstruction of culture the phenomena of distribution play, indeed, an extraordinary part. If a trait occurs everywhere, it might veritably be the product of some universally operative social law. If it is found in a restricted number of cases, it may still have evolved through some such instrumentality acting under specific conditions that would then remain to be determined by analysis of the cultures in which the feature is embedded. . . . Finally, the sharers of a cultural trait may be of distinct lineage but through contact and borrowing have come to hold in common a portion of their cultures. . . .

Since, as a matter of fact, cultural resemblances abound between peoples of diverse stock, their interpretation commonly narrows to a choice between two alternatives. Either they are due to like causes, whether these can be determined or not; or they are the result of borrowing. A predilection for one or the other explanation has lain at the bottom of much ethnological discussion in the past; and at present influential schools both in England and in continental Europe clamorously insist that all cultural parallels are due to diffusion from a single center. It is inevitable to envisage this moot problem at the start, since uncompromising championship of either alternative has far-reaching practical consequences. For if every parallel is due to borrowing, then sociological laws, which can be inferred only from independently developing likenesses, are barred. Then the history of religion or social life or technology consists exclusively in a statement of the place of origin of beliefs, customs and implements, and a recital of their travels to different parts of the globe. On the other hand, if borrowing covers only part of the observed parallels, an explanation from like causes becomes at least the ideal goal in an investigation of the remainder.¹

An illustration will exhibit the manner in which problems originally historical become psychological and sociological. Tyler in his *Early History of Mankind* has pointed out that the bellows used by the negro blacksmiths of continental Africa are of a quite different type from those used by natives of Madagascar. The

¹ Robert H. Lowie, *Primitive Society* (New York, 1920), pp. 7-8.

bellows used by the Madagascar blacksmiths, on the other hand, are exactly like those in use by the Malays of Sumatra and in other parts of the Malay Archipelago. This indication that the natives of Madagascar are of Malay origin is in accordance with other anthropological and ethnological data in regard to these peoples, which prove the fact, now well established, that they are not of African origin.

Similarly Boas' study of the Raven cycle of American Indian mythology indicated that these stories originated in the northern part of British Columbia and traveled southward along the coast. One of the evidences of the direction of this progress is the gradual diminution of complexity in the stories as they traveled into regions farther removed from the point of origin.

All this, in so far as it seeks to determine the point of origin, direction, speed, and character of changes that take place in cultural materials in the process of diffusion, is clearly history and ethnology.

Other questions, however, force themselves inevitably upon the attention of the inquiring student. Why is it that certain cultural materials are more widely and more rapidly diffused than others? Under what conditions does this diffusion take place and why does it take place at all? Finally, what is the ultimate source of customs, beliefs, languages, religious practices, and all the varied technical devices which compose the cultures of different peoples? What are the circumstances and what are the processes by which cultural traits are independently created? Under what conditions do cultural fusions take place and what is the nature of this process?

These are all fundamentally problems of human nature, and as human nature itself is now regarded as a product of social intercourse, they are problems of sociology.

The cultural processes by which languages, myth, and religion have come into existence among primitive peoples has given rise in Germany to a special science. Folk-psychology (*Völkerpsychologie*) had its origin in an attempt to answer in psychological terms the problems to which a comparative study of cultural materials has given rise.

From two different directions ideas of folk-psychology have found their way into modern science. First of all there was a demand from the different social sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*] for a psychological explanation of the phenomena of social life and history, so far as they were products of social [*geistiger*] interaction. In the second place, psychology itself required, in order to escape the uncertainties and ambiguities of pure introspection, a body of objective materials.

Among the social sciences the need for psychological interpretation first manifested itself in the studies of language and mythology. Both of these had already found outside the circle of the philological studies independent fields of investigation. As soon as they assumed the character of comparative sciences it was inevitable that they should be driven to recognize that in addition to the historical conditions, which everywhere determines the concrete form of these phenomena, there had been certain fundamental psychical forces at work in the development of language and myth.¹

The aim of folk-psychology has been, on the whole, to explain the genesis and development of certain cultural forms, i.e., language, myth, and religion. The whole matter may, however, be regarded from a quite different point of view. Gabriel Tarde, for example, has sought to explain, not the genesis, but the transmission and diffusion of these same cultural forms. For Tarde, communication (transmission of cultural forms and traits) is the one central and significant fact of social life. "Social" is just what can be transmitted by imitation. Social groups are merely the centers from which new ideas and inventions are transmitted. Imitation is the social process.

There is not a word that you say, which is not the reproduction, now unconscious, but formerly conscious and voluntary, of verbal articulations reaching back to the most distant past, with some special accent due to your immediate surroundings. There is not a religious rite that you fulfil, such as praying, kissing the icon, or making the sign of the cross, which does not reproduce certain traditional gestures and expressions, established through imitation of your ancestors. There is not a military or civil requirement that you obey, nor an act that you perform in your business, which has not been taught you, and which you have not copied from some living model. There is not a stroke of the brush that you make, if you are a painter, nor a verse that you write,

¹ Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie, eine Untersuchung der Entwicklungsgesetze von Sprache, Mythos und Sitte*. Erster Band, *Die Sprache*, Erster Theil (Leipzig, 1900), p. 13. The name folk-psychology was first used by Lazarus and Steinthal, *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, I, 1860. Wundt's folk-psychology is a continuation of the tradition of these earlier writers.

if you are a poet, which does not conform to the customs or the prosody of your school, and even your very originality itself is made up of accumulated common-places, and aspires to become common-place in its turn.

Thus, the unvarying characteristic of every social fact whatsoever is that it is imitative. And this characteristic belongs exclusively to social facts.¹

Tarde's theory of transmission by imitation may be regarded, in some sense, as complementary, if not supplementary, to Wundt's theory of origins, since he puts the emphasis on the fact of transmission rather than upon genesis. In a paper, "Tendencies in Comparative Philology," read at the Congress of Arts and Sciences at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904, Professor Hanns Oertel, of Yale University, refers to Tarde's theory of imitation as an alternative explanation to that offered by Wundt for "the striking uniformity of sound changes" which students of language have discovered in the course of their investigation of phonetic changes in widely different forms of speech.

It seems hard to maintain that the change in a syntactical construction or in the meaning of a word owes its universality to a simultaneous and independent primary change in all the members of a speech-community. By adopting the theory of imitative spread, all linguistic changes may be viewed as one homogeneous whole. In the second place, the latter view seems to bring linguistic changes into line with the other social changes, such as modifications in institutions, beliefs, and customs. For is it not an essential characteristic of a social group that its members are not co-operative in the sense that each member actively participates in the production of every single element which goes to make up either language, or belief, or customs? Distinguishing thus between *primary* and *secondary* changes and between the *origin* of a change and its *spread*, it behooves us to examine carefully into the causes which make the members of a social unit, either consciously or unconsciously, willing to accept an innovation. What is it that determines acceptance or rejection of a particular change? What limits one change to a small area, while it extends the area of another? Before a final decision can be reached in favor of the second theory of imitative spread it will be necessary to follow out in minute detail the mechanism of this process in a number of concrete instances; in other words to fill out the picture of which Tarde (*Les lois de l'imitation*) sketched the bare outlines. If his assumptions prove true, then we should have here a uniformity resting upon other causes than the physical uniformity that appears in the objects with which the natural sciences deal.

¹ G. Tarde, *Social Laws, An Outline of Sociology*, translated from the French by Howard C. Warren (New York, 1899), pp. 40-41.

It would enable us to establish a second group of uniform phenomena which is psycho-physical in its character and rests upon the basis of social suggestion. The uniformities in speech, belief, and institutions would belong to this second group.¹

What is true of the comparative study of languages is true in every other field in which a comparative study of cultural materials has been made. As soon as these materials are studied from the point of view of their similarities rather than from the point of view of their historical connections, problems arise which can only be explained by the more abstract sciences of psychology or sociology. Freeman begins his lectures on *Comparative Politics* with the statement that

the comparative method of study has been the greatest intellectual achievement of our time. It has carried light and order into whole branches of human knowledge which before were shrouded in darkness and confusion. It has brought a line of argument which reaches moral certainty into a region which before was given over to random guess-work. Into matters which are for the most part incapable of strictly external proof it has brought a form of strictly internal proof which is more convincing, more unerring.

Wherever the historian supplements *external* by *internal* proof, he is in a way to substitute a sociological explanation for historical interpretation. It is the very essence of the sociological method to be comparative. When, therefore, Freeman uses, in speaking of comparative politics, the following language he is speaking in sociological rather than historical terms:

For the purposes then of the study of Comparative Politics, a political constitution is a specimen to be studied, classified, and labelled, as a building or an animal is studied, classified, and labelled by those to whom building or animals are objects of study. We have to note the likenesses, striking and unexpected as those likenesses often are, between the political constitutions of remote times and places; and we have, as far as we can, to classify our specimens according to the probable causes of those likenesses.²

Historically sociology has had its origin in history. It owes its existence as a science to the attempt to apply exact methods to the

¹ Hanns Oertel, "Some Present Problems and Tendencies in Comparative Philology," Congress of Arts and Sciences, Universal Exposition, St. Louis, 1904 (Boston, 1906), III, 59.

² Edward A. Freeman, *Comparative Politics with the Unity of History* (London, 1873), p. 23.

explanation of historical facts. In the attempt to achieve this, however, it has become something quite different from history. It has become like psychology with which it is most intimately related, a natural and relatively abstract science, and auxiliary to the study of history, but not a substitute for it. The whole matter may be summed up in this general statement: history interprets, natural science explains. It is upon the interpretation of the facts of experience that we formulate our creeds and found our faiths. Our explanations of phenomena, on the other hand, are the basis for technique and practical devices for controlling nature and human nature, man and the physical world.